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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 002135

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STATE PASS AIT/W

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MA YING-JEOU FORESEES CROSS-PARTY RECONCILIATION

REF: A. TAIPEI 02114

[1](#)B. TAIPEI 02063

[1](#)C. TAIPEI 02066

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a May 10 meeting with the AIT Director, Taipei City Mayor Ma Ying-jeou said he was confident that President Chen Shui-bian's recent attacks on Pan-Blue leaders were merely pre-National Assembly (NA) election rhetoric and that Chen would tack back to the center afterward. Ma also said he was confident the Legislative Yuan (LY) would enact implementing legislation in time for the NA to convene in late May/early June. Ma asserted that, even if the LY did not, the NA would be able to write its own rules in order to convene and pass the set of constitutional reforms passed last August by the LY. Ma believed that the adoption of the proposed constitutional amendments would bring more stability to the Taiwan political process. He noted that the race for KMT Chairman was currently "very tight," and that he wanted the position in order to bring much needed reforms to his party. End Summary.

Chen Shui-bian's China Fever

[1](#)2. (C) In a May 10 meeting with the AIT Director, Taipei City Mayor Ma Ying-jeou characterized President Chen Shui-bian's recent attacks on Pan-Blue leaders (Ref A) as an effort to retake the political agenda in the lead up to the May 14 National Assembly (NA) election. Ma said he is confident that after the NA election Chen will tack back to the center on cross-party reconciliation and moderate his criticism of opposition party leaders. Pointing out that the KMT supports constitutional amendments to be debated by the National Assembly, Ma dismissed as "totally illogical" Chen's accusation that the PRC is using the KMT and People First Party (PFP) visits to Mainland China to undermine the DPP's campaign for constitutional revision.

Constitutional Reform and Referendum

[1](#)3. (C) Ma also told the AIT Director that he is not worried that the LY has not yet passed the "exercise of power" act authorizing the NA to convene. Ma said that there is still time for the LY to debate the issue and pass legislation to meet the constitutional requirement that the NA convene within ten days of the election. According to Ma, although the outcome of the election will be known by May 15, the election result would not be official until the Central Election Commission (CEC) certified it one week later. So the deadline for the NA to convene is June 1. Moreover, Ma pointed out that the "ROC" Constitution endows the NA, once the public has elected its members, with the power to write its own rules. If the NA had to make its rules, Ma noted that he was confident the NA members would decide on a simple majority rather than three-fourths as the threshold for ratification of the proposed constitutional amendments.

[1](#)4. (C) Echoing the assessment provided to the AIT Director in a separate April 20 meeting with KMT Chairman Lien Chan, Ma asserted that the adoption of the draft constitutional amendments would bring more stability to the Taiwan political process by making it more difficult to hold a referendum (Ref B and C). Ma said the amended constitution will introduce an additional obstacle to the constitutional revision process -- in addition to requiring three-fourths of the LY to approve putting a constitutional revision question to a referendum, the new process will then require fifty percent (8 million) of all eligible voters (currently 16.5 million) to cast ballots to approve the revision. Currently, only a simple majority of the NA, with no minimum public voting requirement for NA election, is required to confirm LY-passed revisions. Ma said that these criteria would render it "impossible" to pass any revision to the constitution on sensitive subjects.

KMT Chairman Race

[1](#)5. (C) Ma then told the Director that he is currently in a

"very tight race" against LY President Wang Jin-pyng for the KMT Chairmanship. Ma refrained from criticizing his opponent but did complain that Wang's campaign was telling KMT members to vote for Wang in order to "save" Ma as the KMT candidate for 2008 presidential election. Ma said that he wanted to bring desperately needed reforms to his party, specifically citing that the KMT needs to resolve the party asset issue, to downsize the over-staffed organization, and to continue the democratization process within the party. Ma warned that these problems would become a drag on the party in future elections. He lamented that the KMT's stronger than expected performance in the December 2004 LY election had caused many KMT officials to forget about the need for reform. He said he would not be disadvantaged by the KMT Central Standing Committee decision to allow party members who did not pay membership fees to vote in the party Chairman election.

Comment: A Leader or a Media Creation

16. (C) Ma Ying-jeou said relatively little new during this hour-long lunch meeting. The process of scheduling the lunch was almost more informative than the event itself. The lunch appears to have been the brain child of KMT Legislator Su Chi, a schoolmate of Ma, who has been trying to raise his own profile with both Ma and the AIT Director by asserting himself as an intermediary. Ma is well-known for being over-scheduled by his staff, and AIT experienced it first hand in the course of arranging this meeting. Between March 28 when the Mayor's office first contacted AIT for a meeting and May 10, Ma's office changed the meeting time, date, and venue at least three times. At one point, Ma's newly appointed International Affairs Executive Director Raymond Wang (former Honolulu TECRO Representative) telephoned AIT to apologize for the numerous scheduling changes and explained that the heated KMT Chairman race imposed a demanding schedule on Ma.

17. (C) Ma did not appear to be engaged in any stage of the arrangements for our meeting, from scheduling to attendance to the substance of the discussion. Increasingly, observers inside and outside of the KMT have noted to AIT that Ma has shown clear leadership shortcomings when faced with challenges, be they the 2004 Pan-Blue street demonstrations or attempts by party heavyweights to derail Ma's Chairmanship bid. One frequent criticism is Ma's inability to find good advice. Most of Ma's inner circle is made up of former academics and diplomats, hardly the kind of political operators that are needed to succeed in Taiwan's rough and tumble political arena.

PAAL